

## Interview with Don Butler sync

INT: All right, Don. Good morning. Thank you for being here. Is that chair pretty comfortable?

R: Oh, it's great, but you've got the better one.

INT: All right, so the first question is, just tell us who you are and how you knew ?? and (inaudible phrase) way back when and (inaudible phrase).

R: Well, it, I'm Don Butler, let me put it that way, from Tucson at this point. Raised here in Carpentaria, born in Illinois but came out in the depression. And I live just over the hill. So I met Mr. Brooks, I think it was 1940. My father and Mr. Brooks were classmates at Phillips at Andover, Massachusetts, class of '09. My father was the captain of the track team and Mr. Brooks was the manager of the track team. So they did know each other pretty well. I think it was 1940 when there was a reunion in Los Angeles and dad went down and ran into Bob Brooks. Well, that started quite a chain, a few drinks and they got pretty well acquainted. And I think it was later that year that he came up and came to the house. And I met him and again, a couple of drinks, which were wonderful and not for me, but they were two rounders. But it was interesting and course, dad didn't realize that he had a ranch in Oxnard and then he had the island. So they got to talking and one thing and another and I think at that point,

there maybe the next trip up, Mr. Brooks asked him to look around to see if there was any land for sale, that they would maybe buy a house or build a house and move up here. So that was the first time I met Mr. Brooks and I liked him tremendously. He was great just to sit there and listen to the stories. So then, the next year -- I think it was '41 or it was '42 probably, he asked if I would like to go to the island. Well, I, God, yes, you know, a kid like that, wonderful. So I had to go in and get fingerprinted and all of that to get out of the harbor because the war had just started. And so we went on -- it was the Santa Barbara was the ship and Jimmy Brooks from Summerlin, it was his boat. And so we headed out and got over at the island and it wasn't dark yet, so.

INT: Okay, can I just stop you for a sec?

R: Sure.

INT: (inaudible phrase) the island and (inaudible phrase)

R: San Miguel.

INT: Yes, ??.

R: Okay.

INT: So just start with ?? of the harbor.

R: Okay. Well, we left the harbor and went over to San Miguel. It took us all day and we got there and went up to the house. And Herbie wasn't around but that didn't -- he wasn't around a lot of the times, I guess. So we went in and

found out where we were going to stay and I was going to stay. And it became dark and we had dinner and still no Herbie. So Mr. Brooks got (inaudible phrase) and so did Mrs. Brooks, or Mrs. Lester. And we said, let's go look. So he was going to cut -- can I backtrack a minute?

INT: Sure (inaudible phrase) maybe I could help you here a little bit. ?? why don't we go back and talk about you having met Herbie before.

R: That's, yeah, it's where I was going to go.

INT: Okay, good. So tell us about how, when you first met Herbie Lester and if you could say I met Herbie Lester, give his name (inaudible phrase).

R: Well, I think that another trip that Mr. Brooks came up and he had Herbie Lester with him and stopped at the house and chinned a little bit. And that's when I met Herbie Lester. And he had cut off his two fingers. And they were all taped up and that's when he had been out cutting ?? wood and that stuff is dangerous. So he had gone through this thing and he was nervous, no question about it. And so they left and it was later when we went over to the island or started back over. And we left Santa Barbara in the Santa Barbara ship. And when we got there, why there was nobody to meet us. We just knew where to go and how to get there and I followed Mr. Brooks up to the top and met the family, Mrs. Lester and the two girls, Betsy and Marianne, young gals. So

we had supper and still no Herbie but she knew that he had, she, Mrs. Lester, knew that he'd gone out to get firewood because it was a wood stove. So then, it was about 8:00, 9:00 and still no Herbie, so Mr. Brooks said, let's go look. He knew about where he was going to go and, because he knew Herbie's favorite place. That's where he'd go and sit down because it was on the Devil's Point, I think was the name of the point there, overlooking the harbor and Prince Island. So we went over there and it was dark. And we had flashlights and we looked and looked, and no Herbie. And pretty soon, we saw lights coming from the ranch house, so we headed back and they said they, somebody had, unusually, had cut their finger and hurt themselves. And all the first aid equipment was in the safe. So they opened the safe and here was a note from Mr. Lester saying that he couldn't handle it. I think the Navy boys were out there and he was kind of the island. And they kind of ridiculed him. This was the beginning of the war and they were young guys and kind of jabbed him once in a while. And he was just sick and tired of it and so he left and went over there. So we went over the next morning and I think one of us, either it was Mr. Brooks or myself, had missed him by about 15 feet. He had his 45 from military and had committed suicide. And I think the first thing that Mr. Brooks did was pick up that gun and he was going to walk up to the point and throw it in the ocean because he was pretty



uptight about it. One of the Navy fellows came with us and they said, you'd better not do that. There might be an inquest and you'd better just leave things as it was. So we went back to the house and got the team and some 2X12s and some lumber and so forth and went back over and began to dig a grave for him, I did. And Mr. Brooks was putting together the coffin and we brought over his Army trench coat, put that on him, and put him in the box. And Mr. Brooks had the head. I had the feet, lay him in there, and he was in his coat and put the firearm right there on top of it and then sealed it up. And then, a little bit later, I say an hour or so later, the girls and Mrs. Lester came over and Mr. Brooks had the bible and he said a few words and that was the end of it. So with that, we all went back to the house and I think there was a great deal of discussion between Mrs. Brook, or Mr. Brooks and Mrs. Lester as to what to do now. And I think they decided to take the girls. All of them went on in because the boat was still there, fortunately. So they came into Santa Barbara and then he turned around and came back in about four or five days. And we went on with the operation of the ranch, the sheep, removing the sheep, whatever we were going to do. But that was that ??. And that's how I became to know Mr. Brooks and there were seven trips after that when I went back, still in high school, when they were shearing because I was the little guy in the bottom end of the thing and I'd tamp the

wool in the wool sack so we could get them really snug and tight. They were (inaudible phrase) to move, weighing about 300 pounds but I would, at the docking time when we were docking lambs, why I'd, I could hold the two hind legs up on a table and Mr. Brooks would do the castration, so we didn't have to, he didn't have to bite them out because they were big enough to where you could do it with your hand but I've seen a lot of them just bite them out. But that's the way it's done. It's still done today that way but that was the experience that I first had with Herbie and the girls were, of course, little, very young, 8 or 10. I don't know what they were at that time but they were pleasant. They were shocked, no question. Their father just committed suicide. Fortunately, they didn't have to see him. He was, you know, he was buried by the time they got over there but it was, you know, really a shock to Mr. Brooks, too, I mean, there's no question about it. But he was angry with the Navy people and I think he felt like I feel today that government is too strong and in the wrong place at the right time, so. So that was kind of ?? first time that I went over there.

INT: Well, you're making my job easy. That was really good. How're we (inaudible phrase)?

R: Well, it was the first dead man I've ever seen and, you know, a 45 is a pretty powerful weapon. So I won't go into gory details but it's not a pleasant sight. But, and I

thank God that I didn't meet him the night before or stumble upon him because we just had a flashlight looking. But it was his favorite place and you can -- we walked up to the point and it's, the wind is, the prevailing wind just from the southwest and you just have to be careful because it'll blow you right over into the, off this cliff. And, but we got over it. We went back and they, certainly, the girls were in tears and very upset. And I think that Mrs. Lester was also in shock and angry with the Navy people, personnel that were out there because she felt they're the ones that kind of pushed him. And I think that the sulfa drugs, because he was one of the first ones that had been use sulfa on his fingers when he cut them off. And that kind of, he was a World War I returnee, shell shocked. And I think that's where Mr. Brooks met him was in Walter Reed Hospital and they, that was the relationship. And I think, too, as I understand it anyway, he wanted to get out of New York and he was a socialite, I guess. And get out of New York and so he offered him the position. But he said you got to be married to go out in the island. So he found his bride and that was the beginning of that whole episode, really. But it was, you know, quite effect. I mean, it really affected me to see that and have to do that. Not fun.

INT: Did you bury Herbie where he shot himself?

R: Right where he shot himself and Mrs. Lester's right

next to him now. But --

INT: (inaudible phrase) Devil's Point?

R: Yep. And I --

INT: (inaudible phrase) if you could tell us, sort of using the Devil's Point and, you know, we went out to Devil's Point and found him, Herbie there, then we ended up burying (inaudible phrase).

R: Okay. Well, I think that (inaudible phrase) I think we all went over there years ago, not too many years ago. And I think we walked over there, to the ?? where they were both after Elise Lester, Mrs. Lester had passes away but the gravestones are both right there, right at Devil's point, down, I mean it's sort of a little vale that you go into but that's where they were. That's where they are.

INT: Were you present when -- I guess Mrs. Lester knew from the notebook left what Herbie had done? And then, when you found, when you and Bob Brooks found the body, were you there when (inaudible phrase) with Mrs. Lester and the girls? And if you were, could you tell us that story?

R: Well, I think that the note said that he was going to take his life. And he has, he waited until he saw the ship coming in and Bob Brooks was aboard because he knew that Mr. Brooks would take care of everything. And that was sort of in the note. So Mrs. Lester knew when we found that note that he'd taken his life.

INT: And was Mr. Brooks the one that told the girls or was that --

R: That I don't know. I mean, it was -- see, we, Mr. Brooks and I were over looking and so that she knew then before we got back that he'd taken his life and we would go in the morning and find him.

INT: Were you there when the, were you still there with the family when Mrs. Lester and the two girls left the island?

R: Yeah.

INT: Can you tell us how that was, you know, what that scene was like?

R: Well, you're pushing my memory now but --

INT: That's what my job is.

R: But it, well, I think they were distraught. There's no question about it. She was angry. Mrs. Lester was angry and the girls were just lost. I mean, their father had died and had been buried. They'd been over there and knew what the whole story was.

INT: Yeah. In the aftermath of the Lesters leaving the island, what did Bob Brooks do, what with being, he no longer had a ??, so what happened?

R: Well, I think that he knew there had to be somebody out there, just because you never knew what was going to happen. I mean, fishing boats out of San Francisco would come in and anchor there. And then, they'd come ashore and if they



could see sheep along the edge of the hill there, the mountain, why they'd shoot them and for fresh meat. So I think Mr. Brooks sent word out that there'd be fresh meat at the house any time they wanted and, but because he went up. He sneaked up to the corner of this hill where they were shooting these sheep and he shot down and put a hole in one of their skiffs and that's the kind of a guy he was. So it was in the trade that if you wanted fresh meat, you would just go up to the house and you'd get plenty of it.

INT: (inaudible phrase) Herbie Lester or Bob Brooks.

R: Bob Brooks. Well, this was probably Herbie, too, because this was before I was out there. I mean, this was way before that.

INT: So, and how long ?? stay on the island after Herbie was --

R: I was probably out there 10 days, a week, 10 days.

INT: And did you ever go back again and work out there (inaudible phrase)? Could you talk about that a little bit?

R: Well, my memory there kind of slips a little bit. I mean, we went up and we did the docking. We did the shearing. The shearers came across. There was, Mr. ?? was one of the lead shearers and there were two fellows from Utah that came. And it was quite a learning exercise because the sheep out there, they get, their wool probably had a inch to two inches of sand next to their body. I mean, they had long staple wool

but it was, the shearers just had hell out there because (inaudible phrase) they go right next to the skin. So they were sharpening their ?? every day but they were paid by Mr. Brooks pretty well and they got the job done.

INT: And this was during the war years, correct?

R: Yeah.

INT: And the Navy boys were still out there while you were there?

R: Oh, yeah.

INT: Could you describe the relationship between Mr. Brooks and (inaudible phrase) relationship with (inaudible phrase) before, so what were (inaudible phrase)? What did they do? What were they like? What was their relation --

R: Well, they built a, there was a building that had, they'd built, the Navy had build for them. So there was a place for them to stay. And then there was a tower that they put up on Green Mountain, well not on Green Mountain but up on the other mound. And where they, it was an observation thing. And actually, when you get up on there, I went up with Mr. Brooks and you could see where this B24 had crashed over on Green Mountain. And they had been there for a year and they never saw it. So you know they were really on the ball looking out but you could see the flash of the parts of the plane. But anyway, I think he was, he's a gentleman and he knew what was going on. And he made the thing work. He had

to. And because they were number one, you might say.

INT: And how did it (inaudible phrase).

R: Well, he got a couple to come out, ?? . He was an old salt from the old country and he'd sailed with ?? and he was a great guy. He was really a lot of fun and ??, she was pretty much in the house there all the time. And she was the cook and it was, God, you'd come out for breakfast and she'd had pancakes. She'd had them in the oven all night, I think, because they're big as the plate and just tougher than hell to eat but she worked. And then, of course, we ate every part of a lamb when we would eat fresh meat. And she'd put garlic cloves in everything. I mean to tell you, it was more like eating garlic than it was eating lamb but, and we ate all parts of it. I mean, there wasn't anything that went to waste. And that was kind of a learning experience for me because, you know, I was home. My mother had cooked great meals and stuff but not like a shipman's wife would cook. But he was great. I think you've seen pictures of him ?? and on the dock and one thing or another. But he was there and then, when they left, ??, I think it was and his wife came. And they were there for a while. It was quite interesting. I mean, they were another couple that was interesting. And I think some of the pictures that you've probably seen of them and the pilot that flew us back and forth -- I never was on the plane but we were, I was always on a ship to do it. But

we would build the docks and, which was kind of a trick because I had a buddy from college then. This is when I came back and I was in college. And he went over with me and we had to build this dock. And you've seen it, the picture of it, I think, but this is where he had fallen years before and ripped himself open. But it was, there were a couple of rocks out there that had a hole in them and you got a 4X4 that had a spike in it and you had to find that hole out there to put it in. So that was the anchor. And to find that, you know, we went on down there and went out there and it was colder than the devil. And we had to fish with our foot because the water was up to our waist. We had found it and one nice thing, Mr. Brooks had brought a fifth of vodka with him down there because he'd done this before, so he knew what was going to happen. And we were just freezing to death, to say it nicely, and we'd come ashore, come in, and he'd give us a swallow or two. So it was, it worked out pretty well. And we found them and we got the dock built. And that's when we were shipping all the lamb.

INT: What year was that (inaudible phrase)?

R: That've been probably in '48 or 9.

INT: (inaudible phrase)

R: Yeah, and --

INT: And they had the Navy, had the Navy guys moved off?

R: Yeah, they were gone and I think to backtrack a little

bit, Mr. Brooks had found a jeep in ?? next to his property there. He bordered Point Mugu, the Naval property, so, but he knew the commanding officer out there and they'd had a few toddies together. And he said, I'm going to take that damn jeep. He said I don't care, that's fine. So he had the jeep and it'd been in the service because it had a bullet hole or two in it. And he took it home. They tuned it up and, so then, we went over on the, I don't remember whether it was the Santa Barbara or what but he got two fellows that were kind of mechanic and they had to take the jeep all apart, the wheels, the engine out, the whole nine yards, and put it on that boat. And we took it over there. We had to put it piece by piece, put it on a skiff and take it ashore. Well, by the time we got there, these two guys who were mechanics were just plastered. They were just, they could hardly walk. They got them ashore, got the boat ashore, got the car ashore, the jeep. And then, they put the whole thing together, turned the key, and it worked. That was the first time we had mechanical transportation all the way up. And Herbie had worked for years building a road from up on the top down to the beach. And we got in that jeep and Mr. Brooks was driving it. And he's kind of a speedster at that point and he was pretty happy we got the thing together. But going up the road, there was a time or two where the rocks were, one wheel was almost off the cliff. So it was pretty exciting. But anyway, we got up. We



had to get out with a pick and kind of trim it back a little bit on some of the spot. But that was the first time we had transportation out there.

INT: Didn't, I've seen pictures of Herbie and his family in a vehicle that would have been obviously before that.

R: Yeah. I don't know.

INT: So (inaudible phrase) it was no longer there or --

R: Not that I know of. I never saw anything over there.

INT: That was, so that was the first (inaudible phrase) you know of.

R: That I know of, yeah.

INT: Yeah, we've been (inaudible phrase). We've walked that trail up to the beach. It doesn't look like there could have ever been a road there but not where you'd want to be driving it.

R: Well, there was a good road going up there and that's because of, they're ?? in the channel parks and there are, you know, the park service and they just let the thing go to hell. And it is, I, you know, I went over with ?? and ?? and the boys, and ?? and we looked at the place. They just, you know, it's a different cycle. I mean, I'm an environmentalist. I believe because that if you're a rancher, you know, that you're stewards of the ground. But there are those that go too far. And I mean, when we were over there with ?? and they wanted this, to see where, what went on because I'm the only

one that knew what did go on. And I think that there was a young fellow out there, wore white gloves and I think his wife had just had a baby. And no place, I don't think, I mean, in today's world, and then there was another ranger that came out. And he was, I think, in his 50s or so and had a reasonable head on him. So he told this young fellow, he said why don't you just let Mr. Butler go ahead and, because he had little pegs that we were supposed to follow. And so we did. And then I, what they wanted to find out is how we got the sheep down to the beach. And we went on and went down the cliff and went down there and then got it done. I mean we built a fence on the beach up against the mountains because the ocean was the other ?? and that way, we could drive them down and take them over to the pens that we had when we were shipping.

INT: How many ?? was Mr. Brooks running?

R: I think there were around 1,500, 1,800.

INT: And could you tell us about, if you know, how his tenure on the island ended, and why, and what happened? Is that --

R: I'm going to go back for another story.

INT: Okay. Could you go back for another story?

R: Yeah, and another, yes, because it's typical Bob Brooks. But this was when the war was going on, way back, before I got to go out there. But if you recall, you had

coupons to buy sugar and --

INT: I don't ??

R: I know you did. I'm sorry, but you had to have coupons to do all that. And he came in and of course, he had to buy enough food for a couple of months out there. Well there were all these little gray haired ladies in the government place and so he had to talk them into letting him have sugar and all these commodities. And so he got them loaded and got them on the boat. And they took him, apparently, to the island, got him over there, put him on shore. And lo and behold, there was a high, high tide that night and washed them all away. So he had to come back and go see these little gray haired ladies again and say, I lost it all. So you can imagine, he had to talk them into it again and tell them what the story was. But he got another group of food, bunch of food and took them on back. They said be careful, don't let it happen again.

INT: So you touched on something which I wanted to ask you about, which is the nature of, and we're making a movie on Channel Island and obviously San Miguel ?? island. What is it about, what was your impression of island life? What is it about islands that would attract ??? What kind of person thrives on an island (inaudible phrase) Channel Island? Is there anything you remember about island living?

R: If it had worked out, I would like to have taken Mr.

Brooks place and been on the island. I think it was fascinating. I mean, it was, you know, you only need cross fences. You don't need to ?? the thing. I mean, the ocean does that but it was a different life. It was exciting. You couldn't go to Ace Hardware when you needed a new tool or a light bulb or something like that. You had to think ahead. I can remember changing a tire on that damn jeep and we had to tie it to two posts and then pull the rim out. I mean, it was, it's the only way you'd get it done. But I mean, these were things you had to learn to make do. I mean, that's the one thing that he certainly taught me, that you could be anywhere and try to figure out something to make it work. But I think life on the islands, you look at the Vails. I mean, they were out there for a long time. They just finished, I think, in 2012. They had to get off. I guess I'm kind of disturbed with what has taken place. I mean, that was a thriving enterprise, tax wise, whatever you want to look at. Government went in and offered them 8 million, finally had to pay them 32 million. So it's, there's a little things going on, I mean. Mr. Brooks didn't like the government and I didn't like, I don't like it, either when it ??. It's too demanding. I think it's unfair.

INT: Back to the end of the Brook reign there, how did it happen? Did you know the story and (inaudible phrase)?

R: Well, as best I can remember back, I think that he

said, I think, I was out there with him and this ?? was my fraternity brother. And so we were out there and --

INT: Fraternity brother from where?

R: From University of Arizona, SAEs. So we went out with him and were gathering sheep and the lease was up. And so, we did, got off, whatever he wanted to get off. I mean, you got the bell or Bobby's got the bell and, the ship's bell. I've got a cannon that came off the Cuba at home and different parts, different artifacts that you wanted to keep. But it was, he was disgusted and disappointed. He was then getting in his 50s, I think, and we shoved off. We took off the sheep, as many as we could, and then I think it was in '50 -- this was probably '48 and in '50, he had had his heart attack, I think, so he couldn't go back. And I got another fraternity brother, ??, and the three of us went out. I made a deal with Mr. Brooks that we'd go out and I'd get these two guys and we'd get so much a head for getting the sheep off. And we went out there and it was quite an experience, just the three of us out there. And we were, we gathered what we could but we, as we made circles to the west end and throughout the island, we'd find clumps of 50, 75, 100 head of sheep had been all strafed, dead. And then you went down on the west end, where all the sheep, the seals, there's thousands of them down there. I mean, it's a breeding point, sea elephants, sea lion, seal. We used to go down there and harass them, you



know, as college kids, make those old seals would, you know, come after us and the sea elephants, you know, you'd better run like the devil. But anyway, we did what we could. A lot of them were, this, the whole island smelled because of dead sheep and dead seal.

INT: That the Navy had (inaudible phrase)?

R: By airplane.

INT: But they were doing it for no purpose (inaudible phrase).

R: Well yeah, just fun. So that's the way it, you know, we only, we got about 400 head.

INT: (inaudible phrase) just tell a story about Mr. Brooks (inaudible phrase) puts in his underpants?

R: No, no, no (laughter). No, we were, at that point, we had been loading out sheep and ?? was still there and it was a crossover because he got madder than the devil because everybody was drinking. And he was out there working. And you know, he had converted a landing craft. I don't know whether somebody's told you that but you remember the landing crafts we had in World War II? Well, he had converted one and he doubled decked it and that's what he hauled sheep in. And it was the Rio Grande, which is a tugboat in Santa Barbara. And ?? had the thing and they'd pull that over to the island and we'd load it with sheep. And of course, again, I had to go down to the second deck and get them up because they'll die

or suffocate, so we got them up. But that was another story. But we were trying to load them out and everybody was drinking on the beach. And ?? and I got along pretty well, so I wasn't drinking but they were getting -- they were in the water because it was, we were trying to load up. But anyway, that night at dinner, they got into an argument and there betting of this and betting of that and she challenged Mr. Brooks and he said fine. He just kind of stood up, took his drawers off, took his underwear off. She got up and took her dress off and took her underwear off and they switched. And that, you know, I don't know whether there was a headache the next day or not, it was quite an experience for me. I'd never seen anything like that.

INT: This is about ?? celebration of the --

R: I'm getting them all, wrote it out. But anyway, I think the last when we were out there and we were, the three of us were up on Green Mountain and the Navy or somebody had put a limestone circle around it because that was a ?? mark. Well, you're up in that area and we could hear these damn planes coming. And I mean, I've been in the service and I was in the Air Corps, so I knew what engines they were. It was B17s. And you could hear them coming a squadron of them. And then all, we didn't, we're sitting up there next to the target. So, you know, let's get the hell out of there and get down on the beach, if we could. And we went like the devil

And then, all of a sudden, they came. We saw them. And they went right over the island and circled and went back. And we came to find out that ?? I think his name was, who was the pilot in Santa Barbara that flew people out there and he had heard them going over Santa Barbara and called ??, called the ??, I think it was, and said there's people on the island. And that's when they turned around.

INT: Otherwise, they would have ?? bombing?

R: They've been practice bombing. So it was a great --

INT: That wasn't, but that was when you were trying to get the (inaudible phrase).

R: Yep, that was the last go.

INT: So once again, we were told that there was a very short amount of time --

R: Yeah.

INT: Notification, like, you got to go but in the 48 hours of ??.

R: Well, I think they stretch it out a way. I mean, once we got on there, they couldn't get us off. I mean, they come and --

INT: (inaudible phrase)

R: Yeah, exactly, and blow us apart but it, and we took everything down to the beach that we could and we beached the landing craft and ?? it down, you know. And we were concerned with whether it would leak, so we backed the jeep in and we

got the horses in. And we got whatever we could. We'd shipped the sheep already and I think we got about 400 head of sheep out of maybe 1,100.

INT: (inaudible phrase)

R: It would have been shot. And we got everything in and then, they towed us into Santa Barbara. I've got a picture to show you from the ?? of our landing and loading the sheep out of Santa Barbara harbor. Felt like Douglas McArthur walking to shore. Off came the horses and off came the jeep but that was it.

INT: How did Mr. Brooks feel about (inaudible phrase)?

R: Hurt. He was a goer. I mean, you know, as I say, he was a perfect gentlemen on this side and out there, he was one of the boys. He was a goer, tougher than hell. And, you know, I think the fact that he couldn't go over that last trip hurt. And so we, you know, he was great. We just had a great time. And I know when we came over in '48 with ?? and we went into a, and this had happened before when I was out there with him and he, when we go to shore in Santa Barbara, we'd go to ?? Café on State Street and have a drink and a good steak. And boy, I'll tell you, that, those were good eats.

INT: (inaudible phrase).

R: Oh, I know it is. I watched. It's a little different today, though, because you know, he, some of the people that he'd get to work on the island were pretty (inaudible phrase).

Get them out of jail.

INT: Could you tell that story, how he would find people to work on the island?

R: Well, he had a knack of finding people, people that, you know, knew how to work but just got in trouble or drunk or whatever. So he'd bail them out of jail, give them \$2 a day and put them on the island. Take them out there. He'd feed them and they had to work gathering ??. This was before my time out there. But I know that he would go into ?? Café and he talked to Joe and he said now Joe, what do you got that you're not moving, because he had, we had five-gallon jugs of cherry and any kind of whiskey that you could imagine, every kind. I don't think there were two bottles the same make that he ever took out there. So there was always plenty to drink. That was my first drink when I was 15, I guess. I never had a drink with my family, so it was on the table.

INT: At the island?

R: Yeah.

INT: And what was the reason for ?? was that a kind of a way (inaudible phrase) the work out there? Was it the nature of an island that you can't get in much trouble out on an island?

R: Well, you can't go anywhere, I mean, and it's whatever he served. It was, you know, I'm sure they got their portion of whiskey but that and good food. And they weren't in jail.



And they were serving time and making money. So it was, it worked out both ways.

INT: (inaudible phrase) Can you talk about that?  
(inaudible phrase)

R: I did. It was in that, the house that the Navy had put out there. And it went well with a pancake from ??, I'll tell you that. But it was still there. I mean, you know, the house, when he died, why all the firearms that he had and so forth were there. I think a lot of those came to shore with Mr. Brooks and when Mrs. Lester came to shore. Some of that stuff, and then, he kept taking it, more back, whatever she wanted to keep of that. But I never had a drink in that bar. It's always in the other house.

INT: Had you, subsequent to the time spent out there at ?? had you seen those ?? or did you ever see Mrs. Lester again or --

R: I never, no. I just, Betsy I've seen, yeah. We've met and talked. She came up to the beach and we come over here once a year in the summer and she came up when the whole family was up there.

INT: And were you able to share any memories of  
(inaudible phrase) talk about San Miguel or (inaudible  
phrase)?

R: Oh, probably so and I think she'd written a book or something. And, you know, several people -- it was

interesting, there was a lady up in, I can't think of her name -- well, my wife might know, but wrote a book and she lived in Carmel. Well, we were, when I was running an outfit up there for the Japanese, she found out that I'd been involved and she was a writer. She's written several books on the Channel Island and particularly on San Miguel. And she had, I had lots of pictures that were framed and we had a house there, so I brought them with me. She took that and took it all apart. And in her books are some of those pictures but --

INT: (inaudible phrase)

R: No, it's right there in that thing behind you. I'll show them to you.

INT: I don't know. What have we missed. Is there any other stories you have that we could hear?

R: I think, well, you've had pretty near enough, probably. You're probably bored with one now, I would --

INT: No, no, I have one question for you.

R: Sure.

INT: So if you knew Mr. Brooks through your father.

R: Yes, sir.

INT: And are you, you're married to Mr. Brooks' daughter.

R: Yeah.

INT: That doesn't seem to be a coincidence, though. How did that all come about?

R: I'm getting the eye from her now. But it, well, they

lived just up the hill. I mean, I was, our place was just down on the other side of ?? hill. So I was up there quite a bit and I can go up there and I did chores for Mrs. Brooks and it was a great family. When I met that young lady, she was 8 and I was 16, I think. And I told my mother, that's the girl I'm going to marry, so I had quite a ??. I had some good times at college but who's this blue butler that, or blue Brooks that you keep talking about? I said just leave me alone. So it worked out fine. And when I, I was working in Phoenix and we'd had conversations and so I came over on a one couple of days just to come over and ask Mr. Brooks for her hand in marriage. I look around and every window had one of these girls in it. They were all peering in to see what the hell was going to happen. But he was concerned that I, you know, in those days, you didn't make a hell of a lot of money and you can take my daughter back to the desert. That wasn't good because he'd spent time in Calipatria in the Imperial Valley and wrapped up in sheets and (inaudible phrase) and sleep and so he wasn't sure that's where he wanted his daughter to go but, then he, I think they wanted to send her off to Europe for a period of time and get her away from me. It'd just, she was in Stanford and we had a mutual agreement and that was it. We got married.

INT: (inaudible phrase) All right, ?? always gets the last question.

INT: (inaudible phrase)

R: Okay.

INT: (inaudible phrase)

R: I was, July, it was such a treat to be asked by somebody to go on this adventure. It was a great adventure. I was sicker than hell on that boat. God, it was awful. And he said, keep eating crackers, soda crackers. And I ate them and get rid of them. And I'd eat them and get rid of them. We got over there because I was a weak puppy when we got off shore. And that was the night that we had to go hunt for Herbie. But it, I think I alluded a little earlier that I would like to have done, followed Mr. Brooks' footsteps because that was a great place. It really was. I think, you know, and they burned up the house. They burned up all the corrals. That place was a masterpiece. I mean, not everybody would like it, that's for sure but, and I, you know, there was no communication at first. And you know, I think when he was injured and had the flag upside down for a couple of weeks and finally they came ashore, took him in when he got opened up.

INT: (inaudible phrase) are you talking about Mr. Brooks or --

R: Yeah.

INT: Is that where he fell on the ???

R: On the spike.

INT: Did he tell a story about (inaudible phrase) how he

???

R: I'm sure you've heard this before but, and I wasn't, course I wasn't there but it was in '37 or whatever but I think that, you know, he really split open his posterior, I guess would be the nice thing to say, but I think they got him up, put him on (inaudible phrase) take the sled and a horse to pull him up there and I think gave him enough whiskey. And he got the sheep sewing needle, stitching needle, a big four-incher -- I think Betsy has it -- and sewed him up. And kept whiskey in it. It was the only thing to sanitize it with and doing that, and keeping him in the same state. And we put the flag upside down. I think he was there 10 days. Took him to Cottage Hospital in Santa Barbara and the doctors looked at it and said we can't do anything else. I mean, he was a tough guy. Swore like one, too, out there. God, he was great. He was really almost more of a father to me than my father. I really respected him and we had a pretty good agreement until I took his daughter over to Arizona.

INT: (inaudible phrase)

R: Well, that's the way it was.

INT: All right, well that's great. ?? are we good?

INT: We're good.

INT: Excellent (inaudible phrase).

R: This would be down in the shearing shed. ?? would go with Mr. Brooks year after year. The other shearers is catch



as catch can but the two here are from Utah and you can see the sand on those ?? that just unbelievable.

INT: (inaudible phrase)

R: Here's another 1950 shot of when we were unloading the remains from the island. There were three of us. We felt like McArthur coming ashore but it was kind of fun. And the shearing sheds down there, so it was -- and here we are loading the sheep and this was in 1950. But, well, I can get you some more pictures here. Just a minute.

INT: Where'd he go?

INT: (inaudible phrase)

R: Uh-oh.

INT: It's the mic. It's okay. Let's see if that helps. Okay ??.

R: ?? in the Jeep and I think (inaudible phrase). Maybe it could have been ?? because he would bring a photographer over there. And here are a couple of shots of the old house and the bell. And I think that --

INT: That's that ?? underwear ??.

R: Yes, yes, and that's just between us. And I think you take this and here are the shearers but they were horseback and pushing the sheep. And I think ?? can show you some of the wood cuts that her sister ?? did of these. You'll see this picture and I think, you know, there's pictures of ?? and all of them out there on the island. Here's another one

driving sheep. And this is Cuyler Harbor. This is the harbor down there and we, over at the far corner is where I wish we had a picture of the ?? and that's -- when we go over there, when I went over with Jimmy Brooks, he pulled right in. I bet you we weren't 15 feet off the cliff but it was deep water and it was way on the lee side. The wind would go over us, so it was the only place you can go to get a night's sleep. Another one down there. There's ?? getting water. And this is the water we had to drink. Came from a spring and it was quite salty. And it would have that same effect on you. I mean, it's like taking a dose of salts. That was one of the stories that Mr. Brooks always told. I'd rather trust me ass to a dose of salts than to trust you to a drink of ??. You remember that?

INT: I've heard it (inaudible phrase).

R: And here's the stairs going up in the old house. Here's one of the wreck, an aerial of the wreck, the B24 that -- the Navy boys couldn't see it but Mr. Brooks could see it from their lookout. For over a year, it sat there. So that's my photo.

INT: (inaudible phrase)

R: Okay, here's Green Island, Green Mountain, and that's the B24 that went aground. Now this picture from where the Navy had their lookout tower, you could see the shining off the parts of this, the wing or whatever part. But it was a

year before Mr. Brooks found it because he was running the sheep by there. The Navy never saw it. And then, another part of the story is that when he went back and told the Navy where it was, they all went over there to see it. And the Navy boys were all going through the wallets and the shoes and, you know, you could shake a shoe and a foot would fall out of it. But they were going through and he just raised hell about it. And he said, you just leave every bit alone. Don't you touch it. But they were looking in their wallets and everything else. It had been a year, been over a year. That all right for this one?

INT: Yeah, that's good ??.

R: Okay. Here's the stairs to the old house going up. I think they had something up there on the roof. And this is down on the, you can just see the petrified, what it looked like over there. You kind of wonder how did you run sheep. Here's another photo of the B24. And this picture is ?? and he's getting water. He had that pipe going back in and that was a spring. And he'd fill that up and that was the water for the cabin, for the house.

INT: Where was it?

R: That was down on the beach.

INT: At Cuyler Harbor?

R: Cuyler Harbor. And this is the way some of that petrified stuff. This is Cuyler Harbor right in there and I

can't remember who took all these pictures. Here's Cuyler Harbor. And here's where we land, right over here, right in that area. And then, right above, if you go straight up, is the Devil's Point where Herbie Lester died. Here are the shearers then. They were rounding up, too. And here's a flock of sheep. I had to walk. There weren't enough horses, so Mr. Brooks had me walking and running. Again, the ranch house and ??, a couple of these. Now here's the Jeep and that's ?? flying out of there. But he brought over the photographer that took all these. And another thing about ?? here, she went, she had a 22 and she was out looking for foxes or hunting. And she fell down and the 22 went off and went right through her knee. And they had to take her to the shore. They called and they flew her to shore and bandaged it up but she was using the gun as a prop. She was going down into a gully and she had the thing by the muzzle. And she put it down on the ground and it went off and went right through there. And here are the shearers. Now this is ?? and he worked for Mr. Brooks. Whenever it was time to shear, he would come over. He lived down, I think, in Long Beach and was just a great gentleman. And you think that isn't tough to bend over like that all day? And you can see the sand in the pelts here and on their backs but their, the wool brought a premium because of the wind and so forth. And even with his lambs, when he shipped the lambs, they'd go into the Los

Angeles stockyard and they'd bring a premium because the meat was, I don't know. It was very firm and it was, the moisture and the fog and everything else that was out there. But he topped the market when he took his animals ashore. But those are the pictures that I have and you probably --

INT: Okay, Don, we're ready if you are.

R: Well, I think, I've saved this because it's from the Santa Barbara News Press. It's dated July 9, 1950 and this picture here is when we brought the remnants, you might say, from the island. We'd been told, or Mr. Brooks had been told to get out of there. And fortunately, we dodged the bombers that came over, so we were still alive. But we brought the horses off and the Jeeps there at the back. This is the barge that we used to haul the sheep in, so it was a World War II landing craft and --

INT: Which one is you there?

R: I'm McArthur here. I'm coming off here. This is ?? and this is ??. These were my fraternity brothers that thought we were going to make a little money and went out there and found that everything that we were going to take off the island had been shot, so it wasn't a very profitable venture. You know, I don't know. I think this, some of these are old pictures but I think you've got them, all of them. It shows us down here and I think you've got a better photo of this, of loading sheep into the barge. And then, we'd pull it



with a tugboat over to Hueneme. But that's the story that I know of San Miguel.

INT: (inaudible phrase).

R: Well I, from left to right, you got ??, who was the manager out there. This is Don Butler. This is ??. This is ??. And then up here is Bob Brooks, ??, the shearer. These two gentlemen were shearers from Utah, and this is ??, who was the pilot that flew everybody back and forth and brought supplies to the island. But that was a pretty great group. And this was, I think, 1950.

INT: How old was Bob Brooks there?

R: He was 1990, no, 1890, so he was 60 or just short.

INT: Right there was (inaudible phrase). Would you say this one (inaudible phrase).

R: This is me, right here.

INT: Why was this photo taken?

R: Why?

INT: Yeah.

R: I don't know.

INT: (inaudible phrase)

R: I don't know. It was probably just, we were all there as a group and been shearing sheep, and so they took the picture. Thank God they did.

INT: Is that, looking at that picture bring back any memories?

R: You bet it does.

INT: Tell me about it.

R: Well, this guy right here, ??, he was a character. He's a ??. He'd been over there for years. I don't think he had any teeth and he'd holler. He, hey, kid. He'd get your attention. These over here, I think you can see that Mr. Brooks has got his arm around ?? because they had a real kinship. He'd been shearing sheep and working with Mr. Brooks for years. And the two shearers were there. But this was a work crew, you might say. And it was just a great gathering. I don't know. I would imagine it's Mr. Brooks that said come on, let's get a picture of this whole crew. But that's it. And it was, I don't know, this is down at the shearing pen. This wasn't up there at the house. We were all down there.

INT: So ?? took the picture (inaudible phrase)?

R: I don't know who took the picture. I mean, he flew over with ?? and I can't tell you that.

END OF INTERVIEW

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